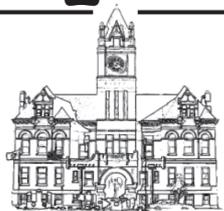


Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Targeted cuts hit fixed costs most

Battle lines are being drawn in state government between those who think "across-the-board" cuts are the best way to balance the state budget and those who favor "targeted" budget reductions.

Those who want to apply a percentage cut across the board see it as a fair way to spread the pain of state budget shortfalls. Those who want to target the cuts believe that some areas of the budget must be protected more than others, and it's up to the governor and state legislators to make those decisions.

In evaluating which approach makes more sense, it may be helpful to consider how average Kansans deal with budget shortfalls — shortfalls many are experiencing during the current economic downturn.

Put yourself in the place of an elderly woman on a fixed income. She can turn down her thermostat to reduce her heating bill and even cut back on purchases at the grocery store to save money, but trimming how much she spends on an essential prescription drug probably isn't an option. She either has to pay the full amount or do without. Making an across-the-board cut to each area of her budget wouldn't work so well.

Take a student at a state university. If he wants to stay in school, he pretty much has to pay his full tuition bill. Barring the availability of some additional loan or scholarship funds, which seems unlikely in the current economic climate, the money to pay his tuition is essential to him continuing as a student. He can cut his expenses for beer or entertainment by a certain percentage; he can even find a roommate to help reduce his living expenses; but applying an across-the-board cut to his tuition bill is a nonstarter.

Kansas parents make these choices all the time. For many of them, paying for child care is an essential part of the budget if they are to continue to work. It's not a negotiable expense. They can target other spending reductions such as eating out less or even using public transportation, but an across-the-board approach wouldn't work.

Perhaps the greatest appeal of an across-the-board approach to the state budget is that it eliminates a lot of nasty decision-making about what functions of state government are most essential. That would be nice but, as the above examples illustrate, life doesn't work that way.

Life is full of tough decisions, and state lawmakers are simply going to have to step up and make some of them.

—Lawrence Journal-World via the Associated Press

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

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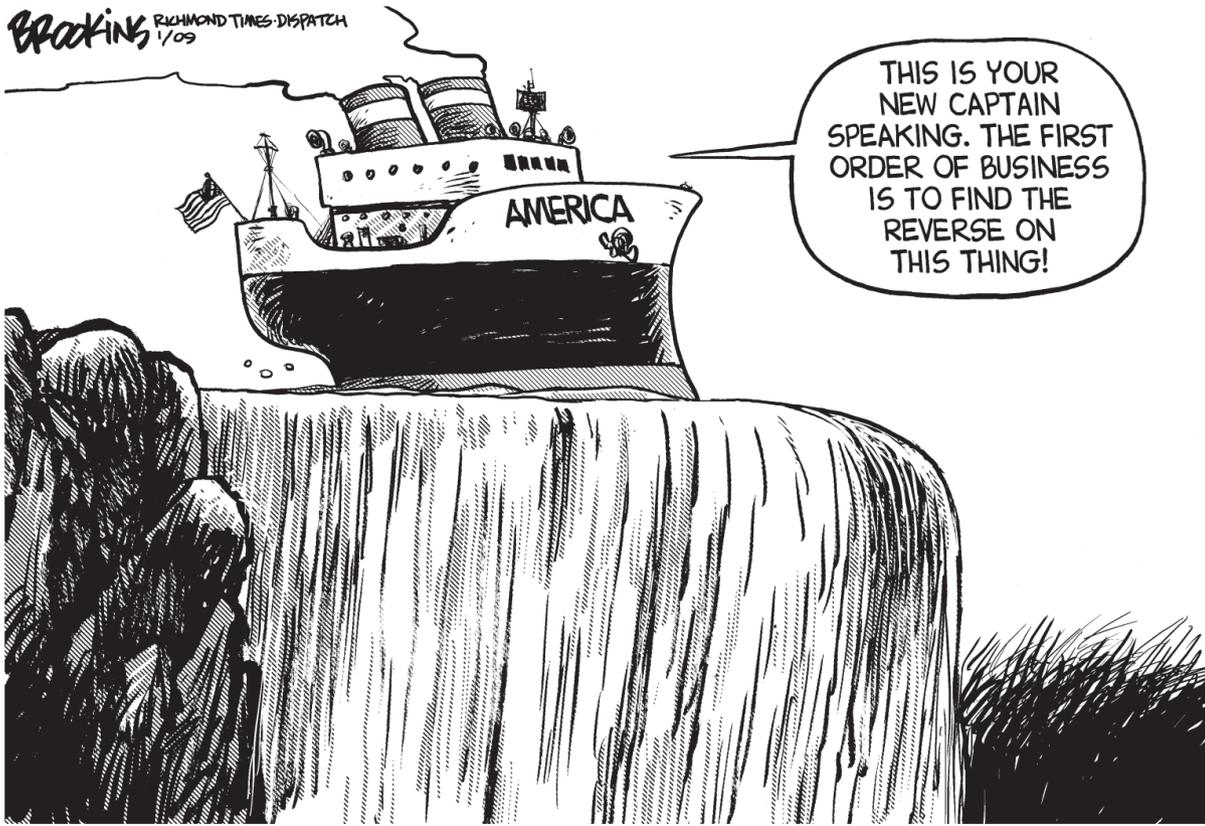
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Brookings RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH 1/09



Does this crop need a subsidy?

I feel the need to report on my winter harvest.

OK, so I want to brag a little. As far as I know, my "cropping enterprise," as the feds would call it, is the only one in the county. That's a problem, too.

I'd apply for a subsidy, but I don't think there's a quota or a market order for lemons in Decatur County. Or in Kansas for that matter.

I harvested a record crop of four lemons this winter. Technically, though, one of them is still in the field because I haven't picked it yet.

And I'm happy to report that the summer crop is coming on just fine. While usually not as big as the winter crop, it projects out to four or five lemons this spring — if all the ones that set hang on to harvest.

All this happens out by the kitchen door, where the lemon tree occupies a space by the glass in the winter and lives on the porch all summer.

The winter crop, which sets on in late spring or early summer, should be the big one. Bees come pollinate some of the blossoms. There are hundreds of blooms in the spring, and the scent can be overpowering.

In the winter, there aren't as many blossoms, and I have to pollinate them with my paint brush. While Cynthia claims I make little buzzing sounds while I do the job, that's not



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

true. At least, I don't think so.

The winter crop could have been a bin-buster if it hadn't been for the big hailstorm in June. That knocked three green lemons right off the tree, a 43 percent loss.

And there's no crop insurance for lemons, either. (Not that expenses are high. Besides pollination, I have to irrigate the "field." That's about it.)

One of the four survivors had a nasty bruise, but it lived to maturity and made a fine lemonade. The other two that have come in out of the field met a similar fate. These were big, firm four-inch lemons, the kind you pay extra for at the grocery, and had lots of juice.

Despite the losses, this is by far the best crop in quantity and quality we've had in four years of lemon-raising. It all started when I saw the scrawny little plant on sale at a store in Colby. Years ago in Kansas City, I'd grown limes. While the tree eventually died, I got a taste for

citrus culture.

And something of a green thumb.

I've learned not to apply much fertilizer. To water, but only when the soil starts to get dry. To be patient and wait until the crop is right — that can take six to nine months from the bloom — and not to feel too bad when some of the babies get knocked off or fall to the floor.

Except when attacked by giant hailstones, a lemon that's going to grow is strongly attached to the tree and won't get bumped off by a careless guest — or batted away by one of the cats. They're pretty hardy.

That means that this month's babies won't be ready to pick until late summer or early fall, I guess. The tree may bloom again by then. It's productive for its size. It's already replaced most of the leaves that got torn up by the hail.

It's not likely that I'll be selling lemons on the street any time soon, though. With a crop of maybe four, that's only lemonade for Cynthia and I three or four times.

But if you ask right, I'd let you look at them. I am kind of a proud papa.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

Budget a top issue for Legislature

The 2009 legislative session opened at 2 p.m. last Monday, Jan. 12, with a brief session on the floor as we were officially sworn in and then listened to remarks from the House leadership.

Just a few days after the start of the session, the House Republican Caucus released an ambitious Legislative agenda outlining their top priorities, primarily the budget.

Opportunity for Lasting Change

These are extraordinary times, which call for extraordinary actions. We all know the pains the national economy brings to our doorstep. Kansas needs its people's House to rise to the challenge and protect it from rash, emotional, and reactionary policy.

I am honored that you elected me to go to Topeka and make a difference, not to continue the status quo. We must rise to the occasion and protect Kansans from devastating tax increases in this recession. We must stand up and cut spending from all areas of government and look closely at any and all areas of the budget where we can conserve. We cannot blindly protect any area of government with a free pass to continue spending our money without efficiency and oversight.

It's time to right the ship and put Kansas first. We do not have the luxury of any increase this year. It's high time for all of us to look closely at where we are getting the most bang for the taxpayer dollar and streamline the process to cut out as many inefficiencies as possible.

While the state and its citizens are struggling, the budget issues are not solely a product of diminished revenues. This is heightened in a down economy but, all shortfalls aside, we wouldn't be faced with such a deficit if the budget process was transparent and the dollars spent were not based on outdated revenue projections. This is not about one or two fis-



Jim Morrison

• Capitol Review

cal years, this is about making the appropriate changes to ensure budget stability for our children and generations to come.

State of the State and the governor's budget

On Monday night, the governor presented her State of the State address in the House chamber. In her address she said that she would not raise taxes. The following day, she released her budget recommendations. We were shocked to learn that, despite her claim, the governor's budget could increase local taxes by as much as \$142.7 million.

By suspending fund transfers to the local government, the governor will be forcing them to come up with the money from other sources, most likely a tax increase. By not transferring the money out of the state General Fund, the governor appears to improve the bottom line for the state. In reality, the buck is being passed to the local governments and the governor avoids being accountable for any significant cuts, leaving us crippled in two years.

This is not the way that you and I run our household finances, and we should not stand for a budgetary process that does not stress accountability. This is our money and it is imperative that it is spent the same way we spend at home, with careful consideration and priorities.

Martin Luther King Day

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is not only for

celebration and remembrance, education and tribute, but above all a day of service. Dr. King said, "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve." This sentiment binds all of us together with a common thread; we all have something to give and we all depend on the service of each other. We cannot let one day a year dictate our involvement; we must all serve, not to be great but to do great things.

The Legislature (was not) in session on Monday in observation of the holiday.

Thank you for the allowing me the honor to serve you as your 121st District representative. My door is always open. Please feel free to stop by or contact me at (785) 296-7676 or by e-mail at jmorrison@ink.org.

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Mallard Fillmore

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